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MORAL VALUE OF  
A MISSION FROM  
CHRIST



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# THE MORAL VALUE OF A MISSION FROM CHRIST:

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL,

AT THE

General Ordination

OF

THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

ON THE 4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT, DEC. 22, 1867.

BY

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TO THE  
RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,  
*This Sermon,*  
PUBLISHED AT HIS COMMAND,  
IS DEDICATED,  
WITH AFFECTIONATE RESPECT.

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## THE MORAL VALUE OF A MISSION FROM CHRIST.

S. JOHN xv. 16.

“Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”

LIKE many other sayings of our Lord, especially in His last discourse, these words have a double application. They are addressed to the Eleven as being disciples of Christ, but also as being the first Christian missionaries. The life of discipleship in the Eleven was practically inseparable from the ministerial life; but it is obvious that Christ chooses and places Christians in His Church whom He does not call to, or invest with, any specifically clerical mission. If, then, to-day we look only to the ministerial bearing of these words, this will not be supposed to imply any forgetfulness of the fact that every living Christian soul must read in them the true, authoritative explanation of its deepest history. To all Christians it is said, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have

chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

At the same time, let it be noted that the purport of the text is mainly, although not exclusively, ministerial. It was addressed to the Eleven alone. It was addressed to them during those solemn hours, unrivalled in the moral history of the world, which passed between the institution of the Eucharist and the Agony. It was addressed to them, as the context shows, in the capacity of missionaries, who had been chosen by Christ, who were soon to learn from the Comforter a heavenly lesson, and to be braced by Him with heavenly strength, and then to go forth into the wide world, that through toil and endurance they might bring forth fruit for the Master at whose bidding they went —fruit, as He said, that should remain. And, thus considered, the words convey our Lord's own judgment as to the source of ministerial power, and as to the object with which such power is given into the hands of men. "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you"—and wherefore? "That ye might go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

"Ye have not chosen Me." No empty antithesis to what follows—no admitted, purposeless truism, we may be sure, is here. The words evidently guard against, if they do not condemn, a misapprehension on the part of the Apostles. True, of course, it was, and beyond controversy, that they had not chosen Him. They had not met, after the fashion of some Jewish disciples of the time, to elect a popular rabbi, who might teach his pupils with an authority derived from their free vote in his favour. One by one, Christ had chosen them (*εξελεξάμην*) out of the great mass

of their countrymen, to follow Him ; and then, by a second act, He had associated them with His own blessed work by appointing them (*ἐθηκα*) to be His envoys and representatives. It could not be denied : He had called them from the toll-house or from the lake-side, and they had simply obeyed. But on the other hand, they had persevered in following Him, even until now, when all, as it seemed, was so dark around Him and them. Was not this perseverance, nay, was not the original act of obedience itself, of the nature of a choice ? In form He had called and they had obeyed : but might not the reality have been that their obedience was an election ? Was He not their Master so long only as they willed to serve Him ? Were not the obligations which bound them to Him reciprocal ? If they perseveringly followed Him now, in this hour of trial and darkness, might there not be even a balance of obligation in their favour ?

“Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” Even in full view of Gethsemane, He will not consent to misinterpret the past, or to modify His claim. True, He does not deny their moral liberty. They had been free to set His original call at naught. They were free to desert, to betray Him. He had not forced self-sacrifice upon the rich young man, or perseverance upon Judas. As moral agents, with good and evil, truth and its opposite before them, they were free ; and in their freedom they had chosen and persevered in truth and goodness. But in a deeper sense, so far as they were saintly, they were not free ; the yearning after goodness and truth within them was not free ; and it had conquered their whole being and led them captive. And whence came that yearning ? His choice, it

seems, is not a thing of yesterday: His choice embraces in its range the whole mystery of their several predestinations. His Eternal Person explains and illuminates His words. They had obeyed His call; they had persevered in obedience, because the dispositions, the desires, the secret sympathies within them, had been implanted by Himself. His choice had been beforehand with them; His love had been deeper than, and prior to, theirs. And as He had thus really chosen them, by giving them the capacity and the will to choose, without suspending their freedom; so He had placed them as plants in His vineyard, that they might bring forth fruit. If they loved Him, it was because He first had loved them. Looking to their act of obedience alone, they had, it might be said, freely chosen Him. Looking to the vast moral history of which that act was the consummate expression, a history penetrated from first to last by the activities of His Providence and His Grace, His words express a literal truth—"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

So indeed it is in every age of the Church of Christ: so it is at this hour. We speak of Holy Orders as of a profession, which for sufficient reasons a man chooses in preference to medicine, or to law, or to some other walk in life. And this language is justifiable, if it be taken to represent that final determination of the will by which a man resolves to present himself for ordination. Such choice is strictly within our power to make or to refuse. But in a deeper sense, none whom Christ will crown hereafter has really been able to do otherwise than obey Christ's call. He has been the object of a choice rather

than its author. As a moral agent, with good and evil, a higher and a lower aim before him, he has, of course, been free, if he would, to choose the evil and to refuse the good. But as a Christian, making the most of the light given him, he has not been free. He has yielded to a mysterious attraction which has drawn him on. He has been guided, it may be, partly by the force of family circumstances, partly by natural tastes and sympathies, partly by the direction and results of education, partly by the influence of minds with which he has come in contact. He has followed, too, the guidance of an inward light, growing stronger in his soul as the years have passed on; a light which has discovered him in all his native misery to himself, face to face with the Eternal Love which has redeemed him, and which now bids him own and glorify It. And thus, what was at first a vague hope became more and more a purpose, and what had been for years only a general, indefinite purpose, ripened at length, in the strength of prayer, into a formal resolution, solemnly taken beneath the eye of the Redeemer. It was not that he heard a sensible voice behind him; it was not that there was a moment in his life when the physical and the moral in him seemed to blend, he knew not how,—a moment from which he dates a new spiritual sensation, the power and nature of which are beyond analysis. These things may be in the Church of God; but they are not common; they are not the rule. Yet when he is asked, “Dost thou believe that thou art called by the will of Our Lord Jesus Christ to this office of Priest or Deacon in His Church?” it is the verdict of his whole moral being that he can answer confidently, yet humbly, “I trust

so.” In such a manner (the order of development may vary, its main features are invariable) Christ completes the inward, subjective side of His choice. But if the process stopped here, it would be necessarily imperfect. The strong aspiration of the soul must be countersigned by the objective reality of the Apostolical Commission. It comes to us, that commission, across the centuries, through the unbroken line of the Episcopate, through the sacred Twelve, straight from the hands and lips of Christ. As He said eighteen centuries ago, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained;” so presently in this Cathedral shall we listen to the echo of His creative word, sanctioning, completing the long, patient travail of His Spirit in souls which have heard His call, by the indelible stamp of His authoritative commission. The complete scope of His announcement will presently be manifest, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth much fruit.”

The choice of His ministers by Christ is fully manifested only in the sanction of the inward call by the apostolic authority. Without the inward call, an episcopal ordination can make a ministerial machine, through which life may flow to others, while itself is dead. Without the due episcopal ordination, an inward call is but as the budding of a tree which lacks the requisite conditions of climate or of soil to produce its proper flower or fruit. Such calls are among the mysteries of the spiritual world; they are spiritual parallels to the vast and mysterious waste of nature. They are found in the outskirts of, or

even beyond, the kingdom of Grace, where the full meed of spiritual rain or sunshine is wanting. We mourn as we witness the efforts around us, produced by these anomalies—efforts earnest and devoted, yet, withal, spasmodic and incomplete,—achieving, undoubtedly, a large measure of well-intentioned disorder, but destined surely, as the years pass on, to wither and die back into weakness and inaction.

The reality of the inward vocation to the ministry follows upon a preception of the true nature of the soul, and of the power and work of the Spirit of Christ. It can only be disputed by a desperate Pelagianism, which, in our day, is shading off more and more consistently into sheer materialism. The reality of the apostolic commission, conveyed by the episcopate, presupposes a Divine authority in the promise and words of Christ, and admits of a moral demonstration as complete and satisfactory as any parallel fact of history. Whether in the case of the other branches of the Universal Church, or in the case of our English Church since the sixteenth century, it can only be impugned by arguments, which, if applied consistently, would be fatal to the authority of at least two or three books of the New Testament. And in truth, the temper of these latter days has been somewhat impatient of the large historical and psychological considerations which warrant our belief in Christ's continued choice of His ministers. Men are disposed to limit the evidence of a doctrine to those moral results which they themselves can trace as due to its influence and action. 'What is a man the better,' we are asked, 'for believing that he is chosen and ordained to the ministry by an unseen Being?'

Why can he not be content to suppose that it is with the ministry as with other professions in life? A man takes, for instance, to the study of the law, or of medicine, or of politics, or of agriculture, without supposing that he is moved or authorized to do so by any supernatural agency. Why cannot the clergy do likewise? Surely there is an abundance of reasons which might induce well-disposed young men to undertake the duties of the clerical profession without the historical assumption of the reality of an apostolically transmitted commission, or the psychological assumption of the reality of an inward call. Would it not be more *honest*—that is the word employed—to content yourselves with these practical reasons, re-inforced, as they are in the case of the clergy of the Church of England, by the official sanction of the State, and to leave the notions of a special supernatural virtue in the act of ordination, or of a real spiritual afflatus touching individual souls with a heaven-sent impulse, as belonging to days which are passing or have passed away?'

As regards the question of "honesty," it of course depends upon an anterior question of opinion or rather of fact. As we descend in the scale of beliefs, we find that the larger faiths above us wear a necessary semblance either of credulity or knavery. To the pure materialist nothing seems more foolish or 'dishonest' than what he regards as the assumptions of spiritualism. A Condillac cannot understand the empiricism of a Locke; since Locke assumes two sources of knowledge, sensation and reflection, while Condillac can see in all mental processes, honestly examined, only modified sensations. The religion of nature thinks the super-

natural ‘dishonest;’ so does the Socinian the doctrine of Christ’s literal Godhead; so does the disciple of Strauss the assertion of the infallibility of Scripture; so does the theory, which treats the Church as a purely human association, a belief in the reality of the ministerial call and of the ministerial commission. This use of the word *honest* implies, not necessarily ill-will, but only, a limited imagination on the part of the speaker. The speaker cannot imagine the possibility of a larger range of certainties than that which he himself recognizes. If other men make reference to truths which he does not recognize, he cannot divest himself of the idea that they must be wilfully deceiving themselves, or others, or both at once.

So much for the question of honesty; but how about the moral advantages of the belief before us? Now, in reply to this question, I answer that belief in a real ministerial call and mission, received from Jesus Christ, is not a resultless ecclesiastical fancy. It is a moral power directly promoting ministerial work. It is a stimulus to exertion, of which, without it, a man would be incapable. It is a protection against an unwillingness to be personally prominent, which belongs to the highest type of the Christian character. It is, moreover, a source of true consolation under the ministerial disappointments, which are a matter of course in all careers, even in the most successful. “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit.” Our Saviour’s words directly connect a strictly moral result, which He calls “fruit,” with His own choice and ordination of the disciples who will produce it.

1. It is argued, that ministerial work, of itself, is a natural attraction to a large class of benevolent minds, sufficiently powerful to need no such stimulus as that afforded by a heavenly call and mission. In other professions, we are reminded, the work itself and its legitimate rewards constitute a sufficient attraction. A man pleads a cause, or he attends a patient, or he advocates a legislative improvement, or he drains and fertilizes his broad acres, without any stronger reason for doing so than is supplied by the intrinsic advantage arising to society and to himself from these several occupations. Why should it not be thus, it is asked, with the clergy also? Is not the enlightenment of the ignorant, is not the alleviation of those who mourn and suffer, is not, in short, the whole staple and cycle of clerical occupations a sufficient reason for undertaking and discharging them? What can be more welcome and grateful to a benevolent mind than these large and varied opportunities of doing good? To do good is its own reward; but if any further reward is needed, is it not forthcoming? Not to hint at anything beyond the clouds, beyond the grave; is not the gratitude with which ministerial work is welcomed, if there were nothing else, an ample reason for engaging in it?

At first sight this representation is forcible and persuasive; but a little consideration will convince us that it is, upon the whole, at issue with facts. While it has such an air of common sense about it, its real weakness is, that it is too idealistic. It ignores the plain, hard fact, that a great deal of honest clerical work, of necessary, inevitable clerical work, brings with it no sort of present reward, and exposes the worker to much obloquy and distress.

If indeed Christianity were a system of teaching in entire accordance with the instincts of our fallen human nature, the work of a clergyman would not necessarily provoke any opposition ; but at the same time it is difficult to see how it would raise his fellow-creatures really in the moral scale. But as a matter of fact, Christianity is a constant rebuke to man, being such as he is ; and its ministers, therefore, are, in exact proportion to their faithfulness, perpetually engaged in a struggle with opposing human wills. How runs the Apostolic commission to Timothy ? “Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine<sup>1</sup>.” It is not possible in practice to obey St. Paul, however tenderly, considerately, humbly, without at times rousing earnest, nay, fierce opposition.

Doubtless there are theories afloat on the subject of the clerical office, which would regard any like duties with these as unnecessary, if not as impertinent. For instance, a clergyman is sometimes described as being merely an official lecturer upon the text of Scripture, capable of imparting useful information once a week to persons who have not leisure to study Scripture for themselves. Sometimes, too, he is said to be only an official philanthropist, an accredited agent of the largest charitable society in the world, whose one business it is to stimulate charity and to organize schemes for the relief of want and pain. Doubtless—it is a noble privilege—we clergy are, by the terms of our office, instructors and philanthropists. But we are this, because we are more, because we have duties towards our fellow-men

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 2.

considered as immortal beings, duties for which we are fitted by a special mission and by a supernatural grace. The conversion, the building up of souls, one by one;—this is our real business. To this all else is subservient. A clerical life which is spent upon literature, even upon sacred literature, without a practical spiritual object, or upon material philanthropy, without that higher philanthropy which loves the human soul, is a wasted life. Possibly a Divine call and a Divine commission are not needed in order to master a certain amount of biblical scholarship, or to direct a well-considered effort for relieving poverty. But to deal with the human soul, with one human soul; to reveal it to itself; to reveal God to it; to lead it in the light of that revelation to the cross of Jesus Christ, that it may be washed in His Blood and renewed by His Spirit; to make it thus taste of the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come; to watch earnestly for it; to struggle in prayer for it; to take frequent thoughts and to labour for it; to translate into the daily work of life that ideal of thought and care embodied in the word Pastor,—of care and thought which guides and feeds the flock of Christ;—this does require a Divine stimulus, that a man may undertake and persevere in it. For it requires, beyond every thing else, enthusiasm, fervour. We are told, indeed, that even the most abstract of the sciences cannot be efficiently taught without a certain enthusiasm on the part of the teacher, on the ground that the successful teacher must not merely exercise and inform the learner's intellect, but must contrive to rouse and invigorate his will. Much more true is this of religion, with

regard to which the learners' will is often not merely sluggish, but warped and hostile. Now this necessary fervour is created by nothing so effectively, as by that feeling of personal devotion to Jesus Christ which is natural to a man who believes that he has been really chosen and sent forth by Him. That He in His love and condescension should have singled out one of His servants to take special charge of His interests, and to forward His work, must be to that servant a source of moral impulse, of the strongest and most lasting kind. This sense of attachment and responsibility to a living Person, which results from a belief in clerical mission, does really avail to create and maintain that vigorous fervour, which is the raw material that prudence and knowledge must fashion unto effective clerical action. The mere lecturer chooses his subject, and in time grows tired of it. The mere philanthropist organizes his scheme: he is satisfied when it has succeeded; he is out of heart when it has failed. But—"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

2. Again, belief in the reality of a Divine call and mission affords a real support and protection in the work to which it impels an ordained man. This support is required, not merely as a make-weight against the pressure of opposition, but to counteract the promptings of natural modesty, which shrinks from personal prominence and leadership. It is not merely required for the effective discharge of such grave and sacred duties as are involved in the celebration of the Holy Sacrament and in dealing with the consciences of men. It is specially required in the pulpit.

A belief in his call and commission from Christ can alone make his pulpit ministrations tolerable to a man of common sense and modesty. The more a man knows of God, of the human soul, of the vast range of spiritual truth; the more he knows of the attainments, intellectual or moral, of those around him, and of his own far-reaching and radical shortcomings; the more must he shrink, if left to himself, from such a part as that of enforcing spiritual truths—even the truths of which he is most certain—upon a large assemblage of his fellow-men. He must feel that the aged may well despise his youth, that the learned may take the measure of his ignorance, and the self-disciplined of his moral inconsistencies, and the thoughtful of his superficiality. Apart from his recollection of the presence of the all-wise God, he is sensitively conscious of being face to face with a phalanx of critics, each of whom might fairly be his instructor. He knows that if his personal qualifications alone are to decide the question, his appearance in the pulpit as the spiritual educator of his fellow-men can only be regarded as an impertinence. Rarely, indeed, can it ever happen that a parish priest is absolutely, in all respects, moral and spiritual, as well as mental, the natural chief and leader of his flock; and when he becomes aware of his inferiority, in any one respect, to one of his hearers, he must perforce fall back in his conscience upon some justification for presuming to address them, higher than any which personal fitness affords.

Here it may be hinted that such a justification is supplied, in the case of the clergy of the Church of England, by the sanction of the State. The State, it is argued, comes to the aid of individual shortcomings with the gift of official dignity and position. If the

individual, as such, has no title to speak to his fellow-men, on questions of spiritual truth, in the tone of authority; yet we are told that the individual, mantled with the prestige and authority of the Nation or the Crown, may claim that title. The State, considered as a rational whole, is said to have its religious as well as its civil and military representatives; and its clergy can need no higher sanction than that which suffices for its soldiers, its diplomatists, its police.

Now, to a certain number of peculiarly-constituted minds in our day and generation, this may appear to be satisfactory. Nor do I wish to deprecate, even indirectly, the many blessings arising to the Church, as well as to the nation, over and above the mere material protection which the nation affords to the Church's property, from the fact of the union of Church and State. These blessings, indeed, may be over-estimated, and they are not without a heavy balance of attendant disadvantages; but they are certainly not to be remembered without gratitude, or parted with, if they must be parted with, without anxiety and reluctance. But it should never for one moment be forgotten that the sanction which the State gives to the Church is not a source of any spiritual authority. No spiritually-minded man can suppose, since the coming of our Lord, that mankind, organized in a civil capacity as the State, can really confer any properly religious sanction upon a spiritual society, acting and teaching in the name of God. If, in certain parts of his great work, Hooker might seem to countenance some like supposition, this is because, in Hooker's days, the Church and State of England were strictly co-extensive; the State of the Ecclesiastical Polity is only the Church acting in a civil capacity, among a people which

wholly belongs to it. It is impossible to argue from the circumstances of the Elizabethan age to those of the present day ; nor is the general principle, that religion, whether recognized by the State or not, is not indebted to the State for its true authority among men, other than certain. “ Every where, before the time of Jesus Christ,” says M. Guizot, “ the civil and the religious life of mankind were confounded with each other; they were mutually oppressive of each other. Religion or religions were institutions incorporate with the State, and ruled or repressed by the State, as its interests might dictate.” In “ the independence of religious society,” proclaimed by the Gospel, M. Guizot is constrained to recognize a sublime innovation, a ray of the very light of God. This, he contends, was the true meaning of Christ’s answer to the Pharisees and Herodians : “ Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.” Human society was thenceforth to rest on a double basis ; it was to rest upon obedience to the civil law, going hand in hand with the independence of a faith which had come from heaven<sup>2</sup>.

It follows that the sanction of the State, valuable as it is for civil and social reasons, cannot afford to the clergy that support in the discharge of strictly religious functions which their sense of personal weakness so eminently needs. The nation may invest her officers, her ambassadors, her statesmen, with a dignity and consideration, which really supports them because they represent and embody her action ; and she may give, as in this country for so many ages she has given, welcome, countenance, temporal

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Guizot, “ Méditations sur l’Essence de la Religion Chrétienne.” Paris, 1864, pp. 306, 307.

place and consideration, to the ministers of Christ. Spiritual power or mission she never has given, she never could give. Her relation towards spiritual power is exactly identical with her relation towards the gifts of natural genius. She may recognize and reward, she cannot create, either. "His Majesty," it was once said by a statesman who has since become famous in English history,—"his Majesty can make a Lord Lieutenant, but it requires God Almighty to make an Author." And in like manner the State can give peerages and an income; but a true inward call to the priesthood and the commission which descends from the Apostles, are alike the gifts of Jesus Christ alone.

Therefore I say, a higher sanction is needed than that of the State for the public duties of a clergyman. And a clergyman finds it in his conviction of the reality of his call and of the validity of his orders. His individuality is thus merged in the majestic commission which he bears; and he acquires a healthy indifference to criticism, or rather a devotion to duty, which is too engrossing to be conscious that it is criticised at all. Of himself, he shrinks from prominence; all that is best, if I may so say, in his natural, as still more in his regenerate, man, conspires to bid him keep in the background among his fellows, and to hold his peace. But a necessity is laid upon him from heaven, which continually does violence to this inclination. The never-forgotten consciousness of the mission which he has received whispers to him, as of old to the prophet by the river of Chebar, that he may not, if he would, be silent. There may be many better men unordained than he; but still his responsibilities are not theirs. "And he said

unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with My words unto them. . . . But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto Me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks. . . . Speak unto them and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear<sup>3</sup>."

3. Once more, a belief in the truth of his call and commission affords true and solid consolation to a clergyman, under the disappointments which are inevitable in every ministry. It may seem thoughtless or heartless in a preacher, on such an occasion as this, to suggest that, of the many hopes which are gathered around this altar, some are certainly doomed to die away unrealized, or to be cut short by ruder blows. Yet to look this contingency in the face is only part of that wisdom which does not "build a house," or "make war with another king," without previously calculating its moral resources. After all, my brethren, we are the servants, not of success, but of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Will, whatever that may be; and we can bear to be told that it may be our appointed portion to be sanctified rather by failure than by victory. Still, when it comes, the failure of bright hopes is hard to bear; it is hard in proportion to the enthusiasm which first begat them. We enter upon active life; we are alive to the great needs, the great resources, the great

<sup>3</sup> Ezek. iii. 4, 7—9, 11.

opportunities around us; alive to the crying deficiencies and the gaping wounds of the Church our Mother; alive to the vast possibilities for active good which are within our reach; alive, not to our own natural strength, whether of wit or of will, but to the illuminating and invigorating force of the grace of Christ. We do not see, perhaps we do not suspect, the obstacles before us; and our immediate foreground is filled with ideals of ecclesiastical, and national, and social, and personal improvement, in realizing which, as we humbly hope, we may have, at least, a hand. Yet failure and disappointment have constantly been the portion of those, who, as we see, on looking back upon their lives, have really been master-builders among the workmen, through whom in past ages most has been contributed to the splendour and dimensions of the House of God. Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, and dies in view of that land of promise, from which he is excluded, in consequence of a personal fault. Samuel reforms the disorders of Israel, yet lives to witness the election and the downward course of Saul. Isaiah strengthens Hezekiah to resist Sennacherib, and dies amid the excesses and at the hands of his son. The career of Jeremiah opens with the hopeful reign of Josiah, with the destruction of idolatry, by the royal authority, throughout the kingdom. Jeremiah is conspired against by the populace of Jerusalem; he is in danger of his life at the hands of his townsmen of Anathoth; he is seized by a powerful party of priests and prophets, and hardly rescued; he is imprisoned by Zedekiah; he is smitten and tortured by Pashur; he is imprisoned again, on the charge of treason, by the

besieged Jews; he is then carried down to Egypt with feigned marks of deference, but in reality, as it would seem, to his martyrdom. Jeremiah is the type of those who hope for much and are conspicuous, at least to the eye of man, in failure. In the distance, such failure has a splendour of its own ; ages of veneration have traced around it a nimbus which diverts attention from the historic reality. At the time it is hard, very hard, to bear : it brings with it a world of new temptations, unexperienced before. It brings temptations to impatient words and to impatient action, or, worse still, to suppressed gloom which issues in chronic discontent with work or with life, or even in the gradual growth of an indifference to truth once held as most precious and sacred. He had felt the beginning of these temptations who cried—“ Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. . . . . O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived : Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed : I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. . . . . Cursed be the day wherein I was born : let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed <sup>4</sup>.” And another, in a later age, not, most assuredly, the least noble among the servants of Christ, although living under circumstances, and labouring for some ends, which are not ours—he, too, had known these sore temptations, and he had conquered them when he exclaimed—“ I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile <sup>5</sup>.”

Doubtless there are general considerations of

<sup>4</sup> Jer. xv. 10 ; xx. 7, 14.

<sup>5</sup> See ‘The Disappointed Prophet,’ in “Plain Sermons,” vol. v.

God's wisdom and goodness upon which the faith of a good man will fall back in all times of trial. But the confidence with which he does so must depend, in no slight degree, upon the question, whether he has himself invited these trials, or whether they have come upon him through contingencies which were practically beyond his control. A general who fails after volunteering to command, fails in a totally distinct sense from the leader who accepts a post of great responsibility at the bidding of his sovereign. If Jeremiah is constant amid the temptations of failure, this is because he is not responsible for having attempted a work which was destined to fail by the Providence of God. He had prophesied, against his natural bent of character, and in obedience to a heavenly call and mission. The words of that first commission must have strengthened him even in his dying hour, forty years later, in a land of idolaters. "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee ; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God ! behold, I cannot speak : for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child : for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak."<sup>6</sup> With these convictions, a man can indeed do his duty, and leave results, be they what they may, to Him Who sent him forth.

But it may be rejoined : Granting that belief in the reality of a call and commission from Christ is an incentive, a support, and an encouragement to

<sup>6</sup> Jer. i. 4—7.

ministerial work in the way described ; is it not true that this belief has also a dangerous side ? Does it not tend to foster an exaggerated sense of self-importance in those who hold it ? Does it not lead many a man to think more of himself than of his work, more of his order than of his mission, more of his place and position in the Church than of the honour of Jesus Christ ?

Undoubtedly, all forms of the conviction that we are specially privileged or responsible, have their dangers. To know this a man need not be in holy orders. Pharisaism and self-assertion in sacred things are older than the day of Pentecost, and are not confined to the Apostolical Churches of Christendom. The moral sense of personal predestination, of redemption, of sanctification, the exercised privilege of almsgiving, the known power of prayer, the felt delight in Scripture and in holy things, have all in turn been perverted by the human heart to augment the sense of personal importance.

So, too, it has been with the calling and gifts of the clergy. The clergy are but men, and their faults are conspicuously thrown out into relief by the sacredness of their office. But is self-importance the *natural* result of belief in the reality of the ministerial call and commission ? Is it certain that a clergy, which should profess to have no authority or powers whatever beyond their lay-brethren, and should nevertheless undertake to teach and feed Christ's people solely on the ground of individual personal merit, would be more entirely free from self-importance than are the clergy of the Church ? Is not that which is personal, individual, proper to a man himself, more likely to minister to this sense of self-importance, than that which he

only enjoys in common with every member of a vast corporation, and which implies nothing that distinguishes him among his clerical brethren? Surely, in every true Christian soul the felt contrast between the high commission received, and the feeble, grovelling efforts of the personal life, is a perpetual warning against self-exaltation, a constant stimulant of that sense of sin and weakness which forbids the words and thoughts that belong to pride. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> So wrote an Apostle to whom it was natural to speak of himself as the chief of sinners, and who yet surpasses all other writers in the New Testament in the vigour with which he magnifies the office which he had received from Christ.

But the precious words remain as a perpetual reminder of the purpose with which Christ our Lord commits to human hands the responsibilities of a Divine commission. “I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth much fruit and that your fruit should remain.” If any in the Church of Christ have higher capacities, whether of nature or of grace, than others; these capacities are not a title to high thoughts of self or to lordly leisure; they constitute an obligation to proportionate humility and exertion. Far better is it never to have received the talent than to have received and wasted it. They indeed whose ministry brings forth no fruit, are under the strongest of temptations to think and say that their ordination has given them no powers of doing so.

<sup>7</sup> Ephes. iii. 8. Compare 1 Tim. i. 12, 13.

They who abound in work for God and for souls, find in that work the evidence of a strength within them which is not their own, and which assures them of the reality of their heavenly mission.

And surely, if ever in Christian history, the clergy of the Church of Christ need that strength in our day and country. Whether we look to the world of thought or to the world of social human life, towards each of which we have duties; how vast is the work before us, how ample the opportunities, how great the necessity! Never before in this generation have we Englishmen felt civil society so shaken as by the political events of the last two months, (may it not be added?) as by the tragic revelations of the last fortnight. It is a time when all who love their country would fain gather in duty and loyalty around her, that each should contribute whatever he may of hearty support to the throne and to the law. But what is at the root of the anxiety felt and expressed on all sides of us? Is it only that there has been an assault here, a procession or a riot there, a deadly explosion in the heart of our metropolis? These things are grave enough; but their gravity consists not in themselves, but in that of which they are the symptoms. The recent violence may not be so tragical in its immediate results as the loss of a steamship or a railway accident; it is more alarming, because it points to a moral and social disease, which is of itself a terrible evil, and is likely to produce other similar catastrophes. If indeed there was only a question of race between ourselves and our Celtic fellow-subjects beyond St. George's Channel, or only a question of law and order between the Government and a disloyal as-

sociation, it might be improper to allude to such a subject on this occasion. But it is felt and stated that our reasons for anxiety are wider and deeper; that old faith in principles has been generally weakened, and that old attachment to institutions has largely died out; that there is no great positive enthusiasm to oppose to the social solvents at work amongst us. It is felt and stated by keen observers, who have no clerical interest in stating what they feel, that there are rottennesses and sores in the moral structure of English society at this hour, which render it less able to sustain the shock of possible war or revolution than was the England of thirty years ago. And if this be so, have not we of the clergy a great duty towards our country, lying in that very path of sacred work which we are bound to tread in virtue of the commission we have received from Christ? The more we can implant, restore, deepen faith; faith in fixed truth, faith in God, faith in duty; dread of sin as the one great and only evil, honour and obedience towards constituted authorities (yet this, in the spirit which becomes the 'Evangelical tribunes of the people,') the better shall we strengthen those social bands which are the real strength of our country. The remotest hamlet contributes something, however indirectly, to the stability of the empire; and it contributes most when it is the scene of a ministry, which, in the confidence and strength of a heavenly mission, brings forth much fruit in rescued and sanctified souls.

And in this diocese there are generally some, often many, candidates for ordination, who are admitted to the diaconate or to the priesthood as holders of a fellowship. Too often a college title is contrasted

with a parochial one, as if a life spent within college walls here in Oxford afforded no opportunities for strictly clerical work. Yet how great is the need of men chosen and ordained by Jesus Christ, that they should go and bring forth fruit in such a field as that of this University, they best know who live here. Here, as elsewhere, sin is rife; here, as elsewhere, the eternal contest between good and evil rages uninterrupted; here, souls are to be won by the same spiritual activities, by the same heart-subduing truths, as elsewhere. But here, there are special anxieties which may well invite the earnest attention of those among Christ's servants who have opportunities of grappling with them. Elsewhere, attention may be concentrated upon controversies, which are not without grave importance, yet which certainly are less fundamental than those which have become well-nigh chronic here. Elsewhere, questions are raised between principles that have confronted each other for centuries, while both are within the Christian pale; between importance ascribed and importance denied to sacraments; between the advocacy and the repudiation of Church ceremonial. In these discussions, doubtless, much is really at stake; but surely less, far less, than in the controversies whispered of late years around these walls, which, for so many ages, have sheltered the faith and love of Christian students. Not merely whether the death of Jesus have any atoning virtue; not merely whether Jesus be God, or only a sinful creature; but whether those theistic truths which Christianity found in the world, and sanctioned by repetition, be themselves true;—these are the questions in debate. Whether prayer has any efficacy with God; whether the conception of a Provi-

dence be more than a fond dream of human self-importance; whether to affirm the freedom of the human will be not to reject the last and most triumphant conclusion of the inductive philosophy; whether to assert positively the existence of God be not to place at the summit of human thought a dogmatic statement, so vast and exacting, as to be inconsistent with the needs of that highest culture, which, it would seem, demands, as a condition of its perfect development, nothing less than a strictly universal scepticism;—these are points here agitated, and, in too many instances, decided in a manner which proves that the most fundamental Christian and theistic truth is engaged in nothing less than a struggle for its existence. Who can watch, even distantly, the oft-repeated spectacle of intellectual perplexity, struggle, anguish, and even despair, without praying the Lord of the Vineyard to choose and ordain among His servants, in this place, men who can bring effective help in our present deep necessities? For, from this centre of English intellectual life, truth or falsehood alike radiate, with terrible swiftness, throughout our Church and country. What is here said in the ear, by a tutor, to a group of pupils, is soon, through the vast machinery by which educated thought finds expression, proclaimed, for good or evil, upon the housetops of the land. Surely, if the sense of a mission from Christ be needed any where, to give zeal, decision, encouragement, patience, it is needed in a clerical fellow of a college of our day in Oxford.

“And your fruit shall remain.” If more be required to make us do Christ’s work than the fact that He sends us, it is here. The work of human hands and human brains, done for and in this passing world,

passes also. It is with thought as with manual labour; it is with greatness as with obscurity; it is with genius as with mediocrity. An earthly immortality is only relative, after all; and centuries, or decades of centuries, are as nothing in the history of an Universe. It may seem, too, to the servants of Christ, amid the steady monotony of their daily work and their incessant conflict with evil, that they are but as children writing on the sands of time their little alphabet, which must presently be effaced by the waters of the rising tide. Brethren, it is not so. The tide of human thought and life ebbs as well as flows; but the message which we write upon the mind of a generation would be indelible, even if it were not destined to be re-written by our successors. For spiritual fruit, even the humblest, is assured of preservation in the Eternal storehouse. Love, courage, truth, purity—these cannot die. As each soul passes from a pastor's care, enlightened, repentant, sanctified, to wait awhile and then to enter upon its rest in that better world beyond the stars, it bears with it the spiritual results of sanctified toil, which are as immortal as itself. Happy and blessed are they who, whether in themselves or with others, labour for that which alone does not suffer from the moth and rust of time! Happy and blessed are the servants of a Master so bountiful and indulgent, Who, when He comes to take account of the produce of His vineyard, will crown, as we know full well, with eternal distinctions, not our poor efforts or merits, but His own fruitful and majestic gifts.

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